Appleby Archaeology Group March 2006

At the March meeting of Appleby Archaeology the group enjoyed an illustrated presentation on the Defence of Cumbria in the 20th Century. The speaker, Russell Barnes first became interested when he was growing up in Workington and he is now an authority on the subject and has an extensive web site.

He reminded the group of The Defence of Britain Project, which ran from April 1995 to March 2002 under the auspices of the Council for British Archaeology. This project led to nearly 20,000 twentieth century military sites being recorded in the United Kingdom. Mr Barnes then turned to what had happened in Cumbria during the second world war.

To protect Britain from invasion the country had been divided in to battalion areas, manned by the Home Guard, a volunteer force formed in May 1940. There were twelve such areas in Cumberland and Westmorland and they were controlled by the Border Regiment in Carlisle. Appleby was area 10, Penrith 8 and Carlisle 12. There were, of course, many others who contributed to the home defence and included the Royal Observer Corps, the Royal Navy with a base at Barrow, the Royal Air Force with a base at Siloth, the Civil Defence Corps and the ARP.

Plans for the number and types of defences were first drawn up in August 1940 and then amended in June 1941. Many of the defences were road-blocks which were located at strategically-placed spots such as road, rail and river bridges or narrow points on the road. They were intended to obstruct and delay the enemy and to offer some protection to the towns and villages they guarded. The enemy was expected to arrive on the east coast but plans were in place should they have come from Ireland. It is difficult to gain a full picture of the intended defences from what can bee seen today as many were never constructed and many have been removed.

The speaker identified the types of defences employed in the area. These included pill

boxes, anti-tank gun emplacements, loop-hole walls and defence lines.
The remains of pill boxes are evident across the county. The variations in their construction were pointed out. Pill boxes were well camouflaged and often had trenches dug around them. Those illustrated included one at Dunmail Raise on the A591, one on Stainmore and one at Kirby Stephen overlooking the A685. Evidence of anti-tank emplacements was illustrated by one at Edenhall, which was built into an existing farm building, and trained on the bridge at Langwathby, and one at an overgrown site at Lazonby, trained on the bridge between Lazonby and Kirk Oswald. There was a loop-hole defence wall at Eamont Bridge and it is still possible to see the holes made low down in the wall to enable rifles or a machine guns to be fired down the Pooley Bridge Road, This defence formed part of Stop-Line: 18 Western Command, a defence line which extended from Pooley Bridge across the Eden and then along its course ending near Brampton. These Stop-Lines had been planned across the country as a series of barriers to ensnare and delay the German forces. They used natural and man-made features such as rivers, canals and railway embankments. and were further defended by concrete pillboxes, gun emplacements and anti-tank obstacles.

After Dunkirk. all coastal areas were defended and one hundred and fifty three coastline emergency batteries were built around Britain. At first these were manned by the army but later some of the troops were provided by the Home Guard. At these sites, in addition to placements for different types of guns, there would have been observation posts, control points to synchronise the firing of the guns, search lights, engine houses to power them and living quarters for the troops. Mr Barnes gave a detailed description of the Workington emergency battery. Very little is visible today but there are some photographs and the anecdotal evidence from local people. Anti-invasion beach landing blocks, as seen at Harrington, and mines were also features of coastal defence.

Mr Barnes then spoke about defences such as camouflage and decoy bombing sites which were used to protect airfields, military sites and industrial sites in Workington and Carlisle. He concluding with a description of Royal Observer Posts used during the Cold

War. These were concrete bunkers, fourteen feet underground and spaced. fourteen miles apart. Thirty two had been built and the last twenty one were closed in 1991.

The speaker was thanked for his comprehensive presentation which had informed and entertained the group and would ensure that they would look more carefully at the remains of any concrete structure that might have been part of Cumbria's defence against invasion

The next meeting will be on the Tuesday 11th of April at 7.30pm in the Supper Room, Market Hall, Appleby, when Tom Clare will speak on his *Recent Investigation at Long Meg*